

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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October 10, 2013

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner:

We write to bring to your attention the ongoing foodborne *Salmonella* outbreak, a particularly noteworthy example of how the continued government shutdown endangers the health of the American public by limiting the ability of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and other key federal public health agencies to fulfill their missions.

Earlier this week, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) -- the federal entity responsible for conducting routine inspections of meat, poultry, and egg products to ensure the safety of these goods -- issued an alert citing concerns that Foster Farms and other brand chicken produced at Foster Farms plants are the likely source of a recent *Salmonella* Heidelberg outbreak.¹ The outbreak has caused an estimated 278 illnesses in 17 states.² According to the CDC, the outbreak strains of *Salmonella* Heidelberg are resistant to several commonly-prescribed antibiotics, and 42% of persons infected with these strains have been hospitalized.³

Each year, foodborne diseases make one in six, or 48 million, Americans sick.⁴ CDC works in collaboration with the FDA and FSIS to ensure the safety of the nation's food supply.

¹ United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service, *FSIS Issues Public Health Alert for Chicken Products Produced at Three Foster Farms Facilities* (Oct. 7, 2013) (online at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/newsroom/news-releases-statements-and-transcripts/news-release-archives-by-year/archive/2013/pha-100713>).

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Multistate Outbreak of Multidrug-Resistant Salmonella Heidelberg Infections Linked to Foster Farms Brand Chicken* (Oct. 8, 2013) (online at <http://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/heidelberg-10-13/index.html>).

³ *Id.*

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *CDC and Food Safety* (online at <http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/cdc-and-food-safety.html>) (accessed Oct. 9, 2013).

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CDC is responsible for monitoring foodborne illness and other outbreaks in order to prevent and control the spread of disease.

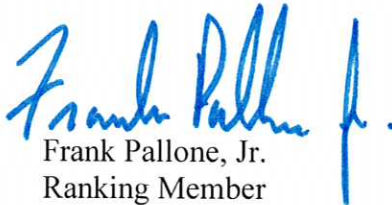
However, the government shutdown has resulted in 68% of CDC staff being furloughed.⁵ Among these individuals are CDC personnel who staff CDC's national laboratory network (PulseNet) that connects cases of foodborne illness -- like those caused by this strain of *Salmonella* -- to detect and define outbreaks.⁶ The agency was also forced to furlough staff that monitor other disease outbreaks and support state and local health departments' disease prevention efforts.⁷ Although some of CDC's disease surveillance staff have been recalled in the wake of the outbreak, thousands of important agency experts remain furloughed. The FDA has also been forced to furlough key staff responsible for establishment inspections and compliance and enforcement -- increasing public safety risks.

We are deeply concerned about the impact of the federal government shutdown on CDC and FDA efforts to prevent and eliminate disease outbreaks. We urge you to allow a vote on a clean bill to reopen the entire federal government immediately.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health



Diana DeGette
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight
and Investigations

cc: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader

The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

⁵ Department of Health and Human Services, *Fiscal Year 2014 Contingency Staffing Plan for Operations in the Absence of Enacted Annual Appropriations* (online at http://www.hhs.gov/budget/fy2014/fy2014contingency_staffing_plan-rev3.pdf) (accessed Oct. 9, 2013).

⁶ *Supra* note 5; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Frequently Asked Questions: PulseNet Explained* (online at <http://www.cdc.gov/pulsenet/about/faq.html>) (accessed Oct. 9, 2013).

⁷ *Supra* note 5.

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The Honorable Joe Pitts
Chairman
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Tim Murphy
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Energy and Commerce